Some Interesting and Unusual Pennsylvania German Words in Eastern York County

By Dr. J. William Frey, Lehigh University

From the time of its birth in 1935 the ECK has always been a rich mine of material in and on our dialect and the ideal clearing house for popular and scientific articles dealing with the field of Pennsylvania German in general. One of the policies of the ECK and its able editor has been that of bringing unusual dialect vocabulary to the reader's attention for study and observation. For some time a small list of the more interesting words in Pennsylvania German appeared in each number of the ECK with the challenge that the reader try to define them in English. This was extremely stimulating to both layman and scholar. We must not forget that the Pennsylvania German is a person very much interested in his own language. Even the most naive Pennsyqlvania German farmer relishes the opportunity to tell you a 'new' word, a different and peculiar idiom, or an unusual phrase to see if he can stump you. It takes but one interview to find this out. During my research work of gathering material on the dialect in eastern York County I found the people (many of them my relatives or friends from childhood) more than willing to cooperate—they literally ran to me to tell me a 'new' word or expression.

In my doctoral dissertation, THE GERMAN DIALECT OF EASTERN YORK COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA (8) (numbers in parentheses refer to bibliographical items listed at the end of this article), I devoted some 150 pages to the matter of vocabulary. This chapter includes a glossary of some 3,000 common words and expressions, of which about 600 are not found (in form or meaning) in M. B. Lambert's rather comprehensive PENNSYLVANIA-GERMAN DICTIONARY (1924). At the end of a previous article (5), the subject of unusual words in eastern York County was mentioned as being a rich field for closer observation in the future. Since then I have had the opportunity to make an intensive and extensive study of the vocabulary of my native dialect region. Many of the 600 items mentioned above are merely phonetic or morphological variations from those given by Lambert; for example: Lambert lists **Aaguscht** for 'August', whereas York Countians always say **Augscht**; Lambert notes **Haersch** for 'deer', where we say **Harsch**; and then there are numerous obvious compound nouns and verbs which Lambert did not include in his **Dictionary**.

It will be the purpose of this article to list some of the more interesting and unusual words of eastern York County and to disregard slight differences in pronunciation or common compounds of a natural and 'expected' type. Before doing so, however, let us summarize briefly the major features which characterize the Pennsylvania German dialect in that particular region; these features (and the words which are to follow) may or may not exist in other Pennsylvania German sections:

1. Eastern York Co. has the following three features which A. F. Buffington (pp.279ff. of 'Pennsylvania German—Its Relation to other German Dialects', AMERICAN SPEECH, Dec. 1939) regards as 'phonetic phenomena which are not to be found in other German dialects':

(a) The lowering of the Middle High German (MHG) high vowels **i, u, ue,** and mid vowels **e, o, oe** to short **a** under the influence of the following r, e.g. PaG **Karrich, darrich, farrich(d), Marrik,** etc. for MHG kirche, durch, vuerhten, merke, etc. Buffington also states that the exception to this rule occurs in words where the MHG open e has become a long **e** in New High German (NHG). In these instances PaG has a low front vowel **ae** and the r is then vocalized to a mid-low mixed vowel, e.g. PaG **haer, waer,** etc. for MHG her(e), wer NHG her, wer, etc.

Note that Buffington neglected the fact that the first group of words named above often has an alternative pronunciation with the **ae**-sound, viz: **Kaerrich, daerrich, faerrich(d)e, Maerrik,** etc.

(b) The complete disappearance of the **r**-sound after short **a** when followed by a dental, e.g. PaG **datt, katz, Schtann, Hasch** (these are usually spelled **dart, karz, Schtarn, Harsch,** even though the **r** is not heard), etc. for MHG dort, kurz, stern, hirz. Again we must supplement this statement by noting that in many cases there is an alternate form with **ae**, viz: **Schtaern** (instead of **Schtarn**), **Haersch** (instead of **Harsch**), etc.

(c) The regular development of **a** vowel between **r** and a labial or velar. Between **r** and **a** labial the so-called svarabhakti vowel is **e** (Shva) and between **r** and a velar it is short **i**, e.g. PaG **Karreb, Warrem, Karrich, Barrig** for MHG korp, wurm, kirche, berc.

2. The diminutive suffix in eastern York Co. is **-li**, plural **-lin** (sometimes **-elcher**); e.g. **Grischtkindli**, pl. **Grischtkindlin** or **Grischtkindelcher** 'Christmas gift'. (Other sections have diminutives in **-che, -el** and other variants).

3. The adjective ending for the plural nominative and accusative (and often the dative by analogy) in the strong and weak declensions is **-i** in eastern York Co.; e.g. **alti Weiwer** 'old women', **die alti Weiwer** 'the old women', **unser alti Weiwer** 'our old women'. (Other sections have **-e** in the plural).

4. The 2nd person plural nominative of the personal pronoun is **dihr** (unstressed, **der**). Other sections have **nihr** or **ihr**).

5. The feminine dative singular of the demonstrative adjective 'this' is **darre, daerre, or denne**. Note that **denne** is also dative plural throughout PaG.

6. The plural verb endings in eastern York Co. are: **-e, -e(t), -e.** The 2nd person plural of **hawwe** 'to have' and of **sei** 'to be' may have the ending **-t: der hen(t), der sin(t).** (The 2nd person plural varies in the different sections of the dialect).

7. The plural imperative in eastern York Co. has the ending **-et**, e.g. **kummet!** 'come'. (Other sections have **-e, -en,** or **t**).

8. The prefix **ge-** of past participles has syncope of the **e** before **f, l, m, n, r, s, sch, w, y** and vowel sounds; e.g. **g'funne** (NHG gefunden), **g'lese** (NHG gelesen), **g'meent** (NHG gemeint), **g'numme** (NHG genommen), **g'risse** (NHG gerissen), **g'sehne** (NHG gesehen), **g'schpielt** (NHG gespielt), **g'west** (NHG gewesen), **g'yaagt** (NHG gejagt), **g'eegt** (NHG geeggt), **g'ardert** (**g** plus English 'ordered'), etc. (Other sections have syncope of the **e** only before **f, s, sch**).

9. The verb **kaafe** 'to buy' in eastern York Co. has two past participles: **gekaaft** or **kaaft.**

10. Of the preterite-present verb **selle** or **solle** and of the verb **welle** or **wolle**, the more frequently heard infinitives (and likewise, the whole plural of the present indicative) are **solle** and **welle**. In the preterite subjunctive forms, however, the choice is generally reversed so that one hears more frequently **ich sett** (pl. **mer sett**) and **ich wott** (pl. **mer wotte**).

11. In the past tense the modals have the past participle which is like the infinitive in form, even when no other verb is present; e.g. **ich hab misse** 'I had to', **ich hab net kenne** 'I was not able to'. (Other sections have **ich hab net gekennt,** as in Standard German).

Following is the list of words arranged in thesaurus fashion, according to various categories related to the everyday life of the Pennsylvania German folk. Those marked with an asterisk are given by Lambert, but not with the meaning noted here. All others are not listed by Lambert.

HOUSEHOLD

***Absatz** m.pl. **Absetz** step from one floor level to another.

Backmulgratzer m.pl. (same) scraper used for scraping out a kneading trough.

beie, gebeit to rock to sleep.

blee-e, gebleet to bleach clothing by putting blueing into the water.

dache, gedacht to put a roof on.

Deckeleise n.pl.(same) lid lifter (on stove).

Deckelhewer m.pl.(same) lid lifter(on stove).

Dreeghols n.pl. **-hels(er)** rolling pin.

Dreelhols n.pl. **-hels(er)** rolling pin.

Drollhols n.pl. **-hels(er)** rolling pin.

fart-belse, -gebelst to chase away from the house (salesmen, etc.).

Fetthaffe m.pl.(same) grease pot, lard container.

Fettkessel m.pl. (same) lard can.

Fenschdersess m.pl.(same) window sill.

***Fuuss** m.pl. **Fiess** little iron or porcelain block or plate placed under stove legs.

G'widderrude m.pl. (same) lightning rod.

Heemblatz m.pl.**-bletz** homestead, birthplace.

Heemetblatz m.pl.**-bletz** homestead.

Kellerhals m.pl.**-hels outside cellar..** door.

Mehlfass n.pl.**-fesser** flour barrel.

Mucke-daer, -dier f.pl. **-e** screen door.

Offe-ellboge m.pl.(same) stove-pipe elbow, bend in pipe.

***Roller** m.pl.(same) rolling pin.

Salsdroog m.pl.- **-dreeg** salting trough for salting meat in preparation for curing.

Satzleffel m.pl.(same) dough paddle (of hickory)—also used for paddling children.

satze, g'satzt to mix dough (with above paddle.

siehne, g'siehnt to strain (milk etc.)

Schpielbank f.pl.**-benk** sinkbench.

***Schtenner** m.pl.(same) stand used for salting meat.

Schtiffelzieger m.pl.(same) bootjack.

Schtrick m.pl. (same) knitting needle.

Ufschpielbank f.pl.**-benk** sink. .. ....

Tschar n.f. dishes (Lambert gives 'gschaerr').

FOOD

Brockelsupp f. milk soup with breadcrumbs.

Buckelschtick n.pl.**-er** back piece of fowl.

Ebbelkichli n.pl.**-n** apple fritter.

***Fillsel** n. (1) puddin' (meat scraps left over from butchering—containing mostly liver—cooked and eaten on bread, pancakes, or alone). (2) stuffing, dressing (for fowl or roast.

Fischgnoche m.pl.(same) fishbone.

Galrich m. souse (pig's feet).

Gnochefleesch n. soup-bone.

Grensli n.pl.**-n** doughnut.

Lewwerwarschtfillsel n. puddin' (see **Fillsel** above).

Riwwelboi m.pl.(same) crumb pie.

Schwanssupp f. (ox)-tail soup.

FRUITS, PLANTS, VEGETABLES, TREES

bloschtengicher Tee m. peppermint tea.

Fingergraut n. finger-grass.

Fuchsbeer f.pl.**-e** fox grape.

Fuchsdraub f.pl.**-drauwe** fox grape.

Geilsreddich m. horseradish (used humorously—regular term is **Meerreddich**).

Geelrieweblum f.pl.**-e** yellow daisy.

Gleebschtee m.pl.(same) clingstone (peach).

Graddel-bohn, -buhn f.pl.**-e** pole bean.

Graddeldarn f.pl.**-e** dewberry.

Grautschtarze m.pl.(same) cabbage stalk with head cut off.

Groddetee m. sage tea.

harde, g'hardt to dry (fruit, berries).

Haasetee m. rabbit tea.

Kolweblaat n.pl.**-bledder** narrow-leafed 'plantain.

***Maagebaalsem** m. peppermint tea.

Maagetee m. peppermint tea.

Pefferbaalsem m. wild pepper grass.

Pissaentblumm f.pl.**-e** dandelion flower.

Piss(e)blumm f.pl.**-e** dandelion.

Pissedaent f.pl.**-e** dandelion.

Rheiblumm f.pl.**-e** Indian tobacco.

Reefaar(t)bidders n. tansy bitters.

Reefaar(t)tee m. tansy tea.

Saffrichtee m. saffron.

Seiwarzel f.pl.**-warzle** plantain leaf.

Some-, Saame-welschkarn n. seed corn.

Schpannodel f.pl.**-nodle** Spanish needle.

***schpinne, g'schpunne** to creep (of vines).

Schwarzbeer f.pl.**-e** blackberry.

uf-zweige, -gezweigt to graft (tree limbs).

verloche, verlocht to bury apples, vegetables, etc. in the ground.

verschtutzt dead, dwarfed (of plants).

weissschtengicher Tee m. peppermint tea.

DRESS, CLOTHING

breetlatzich having a broad front lap: **breetlatzzichi Hosse.**

Eibendling f.pl.**-e** hem.

ei-feedle, -feddle; -g'feedelt to lace (shoes).

Eisaam m. hem.

ei-saame, -g'saamt to hem (in).

Graawe m.pl. (same) cuff.

Halsgraawe m.pl.(same) collar.

Kuddel m.pl.(same) or **Kiddel** overall jacket.

***Schnawwel** m.pl.(same) visor (of a cap); called 'snovvel' in the English vernacular of the region.

***Wammes** m.pl.(same) jacket, vest, coat.

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(Continued)

BARN AND EQUIPMENT

Brauband f.n. band (in harness), goes over horse's eyes.

Draagkett f.pl.-e carrying chain (on middle leaders, from one hame to another).

Dreigeilswoog f.pl.woge three-horse tree.

Fimft(e)kett f.pl.-e chain on wagon tongue.

Fimftraad n.pl.-redder '5th wheel' of a wagon, turn-table for front wheels.

Gawwelhoke m.pl.(same) a three-pronged device attached to a shovel plow to make it into a cultivator.

***Heisli** n.pl.-n small house.

Hinnertschar n.f. breech-band which is put on the wheelers (i.e., wheel-horses).

Hoke-eise n.pl.(same) an iron cleat put on a horse's hoof to straighten it in walking; called 'hook-shoe' in vernacular.

Iemekaschde m.pl.(same) or **-keschde** beehive.

Kieband f.n. pl.-**benner** throat latch on bridle.

Ochsekopp m.pl.-**kepp** (same as **Gawwelhoke**, above).

Schtachelband n.pl.-**benner** a spiked muzzle put on calves to prevent their sucking the cow.

Schippschtoff(t) m,n. middlings; vernacular: 'ship.'

Viergeilswoog f.pl.-**woge** four-horse tree.

TOOLS, FARM IMPLEMENTS, ETC.

Baam-, Boom-saeg f.pl.-e crosscut saw (for 2 men).

Butzmiehl f.pl.-e cleaning mill (used for separating chaff from grain).

Darnehoke m.pl.(same) brier hook, brier scythe.

Deichelschneider m.pl.(same) pipe wrench, pipe cutter.

Dreckkarrich m.pl.(same) 2-wheeled dump cart for hauling dirt.

Eegeschlidde m.pl.(same) manure sledge.

Ewwerschpitz m.pl.(same) grubbing hoe.

Felse-bulver, -pulver n. powder used for blasting rocks, dynamite.

Fruchtgawwel f.pl.-**gawwle** wheat fork (2 prongs).

Graabeise n.pl.(same) digging iron.

Greizschpiggel m.pl.(same) pick; mattock.

Greizschpitz m.pl.(same) grubbing hoe

Grumbeereschaufel f.pl.-**schaufle** potato shovel (or iron).

***Haekel** m.pl.(same) onion hook, little iron scratcher used for gardening.

Hokehammer m.pl.(same) or **-hemmer** claw-hammer.

***Hund** m.pl.(same) dog, i.e. iron clamp used for holding posts while hewing them.

Kalbmeessel m.pl.(same) cold chisel (variation of **Kaltmeessel**).

Kaer f.pl.-e **trowel** (variation of **Kell**).

Landmeessel m.pl.(same) digging iron.

Langbluug m.pl.-**blieg** furrow-plough, breaking-plough.

Leetkolwe m.pl.(same) soldering iron.

Lochax f.pl.-**ex** axe used for cutting square holes in fence posts.

***Messerschtang** f.pl.-e pitman rod on a mower.

Mischtschlidde m.pl.(same) manure sledge.

Poschdeax f.pl.-**ex** post-axe (for mortising).

Poschdehund m.pl.(same) dog used for holding posts while hewing.

Raschbe m.pl.(same) rasp.

***Ratteschwans** m.pl.-**schwens** fuse.

***Reefschtecke** m.pl.(same) a grain cradle made of barrel staves.

Seigratzer m.pl.(same) hog scraper used for removing bristles in preparation for butchering.

Saegeglamm f.pl.-e clamp for holding saws while filing.

Schaufelbluug m.pl.-**blieg** shovel plough.

Schpaltax f.pl.-**ex** splitting axe.

Schteehammer m.pl.(same) or **-hemmer** stone sledge.

Schteeschlidde m.pl.(same) stone sled, manure sled.

Schtemmeise n.pl.(same) digging iron.

Schlaghammer m.pl.(same) or **-hemmer** hammer used for driving jumper into rock.

***Voggel** m.pl. **Veggel** hod, mason's hawk.

Waasembluug m.pl.-**blieg** breaking plough.

Welschkarn-baschdel, -baschder m.pl.(same) husking peg, pin.

The original of the letter bears the imprint of a coat of arms in red sealing wax. It shows on a shield an elk's head with the initials M. L. The shield is surmounted by a helmet from which springs an elk. On the outside of the letter the recipient has written for filing purposes: "Fort Pitt May 27th 1790 M. Lang recd the 8th June 1790 answd the " So it seems that Mr. Wachsmut never answered the letter, just filed it and perhaps kept on wondering what killed the dog.

The original letter is the property of Mr. Claude W. Unger of Pottsville, Pa., who has kindly made it available for translation.

RUDOLF HOMMEL,
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The above shows M. Lang's coat-of-arms. If it rightfully belonged to him it may be an indication of his aristocratic German origin. That in turn may explain his deep scorn for the German peasants with whom he had to do in Pennsylvania. But perhaps he was only another of the numerous frontier charlatans and mountebanks.

In his translation of M. Lang's interesting letter Rudolf Hommel has endeavored to retain the piquant and illiterate aspects of the original German. M. Lang used "Pingsten" for Whitsuntide, rendered by the translator with "Pinkster," a word which came into our American vocabulary by way of the Holland Dutch of New York. Mr. Hommel points out that he has found this word used in a Philadelphia publication as late as 1830.—ED.

Welschkarnmesser n.pl.(same) corn chopper.

Welschkarnschaffer m.pl.(same) cultivator.

Welschkarnscheier f.pl.-e corn barn.

WAGONS, VEHICLES, MACHINERY

Hinnerschemel m.pl.(same) rear bolster of wagon.

Hoikicker m.pl.(same) hay-tedder.

***Reef** m.pl.(same) tire, rim.

Vedderschemel m.pl.(same) front bolster of wagon.

Waggesaddel m.pl.(same) saddle on the saddle-horse (left horse next to wagon).

***Woog** f.pl. **Woge** double tree.

Zweegeilswagge m.pl.-**wegge** or-**wege** 2-horse wagon.

ANIMALS

***Aadler** m.pl.(same) turkey buzzard. In the vernacular the turkey buzzard is often erroneously called an eagle because of its resemblance to the bald eagle.

Bleeser m.pl.(same) viper, puff-adder; snake which blows its head up; vernacular: blow-snake.

Fettheffli n.pl.-e oil-gland of fowls, uropygial gland.

Fisch-warrem, -warm m.pl.(same) earthworm; vernacular: fishworm.

Gaulesel m.pl. **Geilesel** horse-mule, male mule.

gaulich in heat (of mares).

Geld, Gelz, Gelst f.pl.-e 'castrated', spayed sow.

Gelder m.pl.(same) gelding.

Glopp m.pl.(same) cryptorchid (bull, boar, stallion).

Gloppbull m.pl.-e cryptorchid bull.

Gloppewwer m.pl.(same) cryptorchid boar.

Grickset m.n. pl.(same) cricket.

Grund-maus f.pl.-**meis** ground mole.

Hawwerkeffer m.pl.(same) oats bug, thryps.

Heckedruschel f.pl.-**druschle** thrush.

Iemevoggel m.pl.-**veggel** kingbird.

***Keenich** m.pl.(same) kingbird.

Marresel m.f.pl.(same) mare-mule, female mule.

Mausevoggel m.pl.-**veggel** wren.

Mausekeenich m.pl.(same) wren.

Molligropp m.pl.-e tadpole.. Note that the word 'mullygrub' is used in Pa. (and also in the South, I have noticed) as a term of opprobrium, e.g. 'he's an old mullygrub!', or as an adj. 'he was the mullygrubbinst old man I ever saw!'. In this connection it should be noted that 'grub' means 'worm' in the South. But 'mullygrub' is used in the Eng. of the PaG in York Co. not only as term of opprobrium but also is the common term for 'tadpole'.

Muckebreeme m.pl.(same) woods fly.

Muli f.pl.-**s** hornless cow; vernacular: mooley.

Mulikuh f.pl.-**kieh** hornless cow, mooley.

Nitz m.f.pl.(same) or **-e** nit.

Ooshaahne m.pl.(same) turkey buzzard.

Ooshinkel n.pl.(same) turkey buzzard.

***rippich** showing the ribs (of a lean horse).

Rootvoggel m.pl.-**veggel** redbird, cardinal.

***setze, g'setzt** reflexive: to start brooding (of hens).

***schpanne, g'schpannt** to harness horses
raus-schpanne, -g'schpannt to unharness, unhitch horses.

schprautze, schprotze; g'schprautzt, g'schprotzt reflexive: to ruffle the feathers (of turkeys).

Schtarnekuh f.pl.-**kieh** cow with white mark on her face.

Schtecher m.pl.(same) sting or stinger of a bee.

***schtell dich!** hold still! (said to cows while milking).

schtierich in heat (of cows).

schtroie, g'schtroit to bed cattle, horses.

Scheckikuh f.pl.-**kieh** spotted cow.

Schieppe pl. scales of fish.

***Schinner-, Schinne-hannes** m. the man who comes and hauls away dead animals; vernacular same as dialect. Lambert has 'term of opprobrium'.

Schmutzheffli n.pl.-**n** oil-gland of fowls.

Schnauveggli n.pl.-**n** humming bird. Lambert has 'schnaerrvojjel'.

Titzli n.pl.-**n** little bird (wren?)

uf-schpraue, -g'schpraut reflexive: to ruffle the feathers (of turkeys).

Weschpschtecher m.pl.(same) wasp's stinger.

Widderkau m. cud, quid.

Wielmaus f.pl.-**meis** ground mole.

Zitzli n.pl.-**n** (same as **Titzli**).

COWS AND MILK

ab-zeppe -(ge)zeppt to skim (milk); **abzeppti Millich** skim milk.

***aus-zoppe, -gezoppt** to finish milking.

buddre, gebuddert to churn butter.

Dickmillich f. thick-milk.

Millichmolke pl. milk whey, clabber.

FIELD AND WOODS

***aa-faahre, -g'faahre** to turn the first furrow.

Aagle-, Aakle-weeze m. bearded wheat.

aaglich, aaklich bearded (of wheat).

Aagelschprau f. bearded wheat.

ab-reffe, -g'refft to cradle (grain).

Aagleweeze m. bearded wheat.

baardich bearded (of wheat).

Beintsaarz m. pine sap.

Glattischprau f. smooth chaff wheat.

glatt, glott-schprauich, -schpreiich beardless, smooth chaffed (of wheat).

Gleddebodde m. clay, layer under the surface soil.

glotzich soggy (of ground).

hopprich uneven (road, field).

larre, g'larrt to begin to hew.

Lochposchde m.pl.(same) post with holes for inserting rails to make a fence.

***uf-mache, -g'macht: 's Feld ufmache** to open the field, cut the first row of grain.

ruplich uneven, rough (road, field).

Saarze m. sap of pine tree.

Schtubbel f.pl. **Schtubble** stubble.

schtubblich stubbly.

WEATHER

Dimmelwedder n. thunderstorm.

HEALTH AND SICKNESS

bettfescht bedridden

bettgrank sick in bed.

Sindeschuld f.pl.-e any boil or sore on the body as punishment for having sinned. The vernacular word is the same as the dialect. When a person with a boil or sore on his body goes walking by, people point to it and say, **ya, sell iss dei Sindeschuld!**

schtoll-fiessich, -fuussich club-footed.

Weegscheisser m.pl.(same) sty (on the eye).

(To Be Concluded)